ASL REQUIRED

Court to Gov. – Include Sign at Updates

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s daily press conferences update not only New Yorkers but the nation and the world of the COVID-19 crisis. However, his reliable daily televised messages were not accessible to all, until May 13.

On May 11, United States District Judge Valerie Caproni for the Southern District of New York granted Disability Rights New York’s motion for a Preliminary Injunction and ordered the Governor to immediately implement in-frame ASL interpreters during his press briefings.

In an undated press release the Division of Human Rights issued “From the Office of Governor Andrew Cuomo on ASL Interpretation.” “Our office has already been providing closed captioning for the Governor’s press conferences; starting today real-time ASL interpretation for the Governor’s press conferences will also be available at www.governor.ny.gov. Going forward, we will continue to assess efforts around accessibility for the Governor’s press conferences.” On May 13, complying with the judge’s order, an ASL interpreter was televised on the lower right hand corner of the screen, not in proximity to Governor. The Governor’s office had not yet publicly commented at press time.

Cuomo had drawn criticism that the 49 other state governors had televised ASL interpreters for COVID-19 media coverage by the time of the lawsuit.

TTY or closed captioning does not work well for many deaf people who sign, for whom reading English is akin to learning a second language. ASL relies on facial expressions and other gestures and conveys more accurate information than teletype accommodations.

One defendant in the lawsuit lived at a location which did not provide internet, so he was unable to view Cuomo’s real time interpreter online. Cuomo had defended that arrangement, at various times saying it was enough, that there were technical issues with televising the interpreter and that for safety’s sake he did not wish to bring additional staff to the briefings.

The court compelled him to do more. During the May 13 broadcast there was no mention of the ASL interpreter on screen. Before May 13, viewers were not provided with clear directions such as a message onscreen directing them to the NY.gov website where ASL interpretation was available.

Politicoreported that Arkady Belozovsky has been interpreting Cuomo’s words since March 27 online, but did not appear in-frame until the judge’s order. Belozovsky, who is deaf, is a certified deaf interpreter, trained to interpret for individuals who might have a more limited knowledge of American Sign Language. During

Continued on page 16
Hello Everyone,
Over the past few months, NYC has been focusing on the outbreak, containment, and treatment of COVID-19. We have worked to flatten the curve of COVID-19 through the expansion of accessible testing facilities, continuity of health education, and adherence to social distancing as well as face-covering mandates. Despite the positive indications of our progress, we cannot ease up on health and safety practices.

Everyone should continue following NYC Health Department guidelines. Stay home unless absolutely necessary. If you need to go out, wear some form of facial covering, stay a minimum distance of six feet apart from others whenever possible, avoid touching your face, and wash your hands frequently. For the latest Health guidelines visit nyc.gov/coronavirus or text “COVID” to 692-692.

If you are in need of food delivery, home healthcare services, mental health services or anything else during this time, please visit our website at NYC.gov/disability-coronavirus for continually updated funding are all based on census statistics. They cannot be used to mine eligibility for government benefits. Beyond COVID resources, my office has been working to ensure accessibility in the digital space. On Global Accessibility Awareness Day (5/21), we released a series of accessibility guides for websites, documents, social media, videos and virtual meetings. For a complete list of these guides visit NYC.gov/accessibilityguides.

In addition, to help pass the time we have put together a collection of accessible virtual events that you can enjoy from home. Our Virtual Activities Toolkit contains activities such as virtual events, museum tours, work-outs, performances, podcasts, and more. To view our continually updated list, please visit NYC.gov/disability-virtualactivities. In addition, we plan on virtually celebrating the 30th anniversary of the ADA throughout the month of July so please visit nyc.gov/ada30 for updates on virtual events.

As we begin to plan for what an inclusive recovery process looks like, MOPD will continue to advocate for the needs of the disability community. If anyone with a disability needs any kind of assistance, please do not hesitate to reach out to our office using the contact information above.

Thank you to all of our doctors, nurses, home health aides, personal care attendants, and other frontline healthcare staff who are saving lives every single day. Thank you to our grocery store workers, our local restaurants, food delivery services, transit workers, taxi and for-hire vehicle drivers, sanitation workers, and other essential employees who continue to keep our City running.

We are all in this together and we will move past this stronger than ever.

Ciao,
Commissioner Victor Calise

MOPD Commissioner Victor Calise

The Deadline For The July Issue of Able Newspaper Will Be June 16

NYC Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities

Census Available Online
Affects Everyone

The census, which has been available online since mid-March, collects simple data from every household in the country about each person who lives in that household. Important programs, services and funding are all based on census results.

Affordable housing prices is one example. If the majority of New York residents who respond to the census are those who are upper income individuals, then affordable housing is based on that income, which will not be an accurate account of everyone’s average income. The questionnaire will ask the number of people living in each home, along with their gender, age, race and ethnicity. It will also inquire whether the home is owned or rented. The census will not ask about immigration or citizenship status, income or social security number.

By law, the information will be kept confidential. Responses can only be used to produce statistics. They cannot be used for law enforcement or to determine eligibility for government benefits.

For information contact Margi Trapani, mtrapani@cid-ny.org.

Next available census day is July 15.

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NYC Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities

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Ciao,
Cuts Impact Medicaid-Funded Programs

By Patricia Horwell

Hospitals, Medicaid recipients, and homecare beneficiaries stand to lose under Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s 2020-2021 state budget, effective Oct. 1. One of the Medicaid Re-design Team’s recommendations was a $400 million cut in payments to hospitals, including $138 million less for New York City’s public hospital system. Cuomo defended the cuts by pointing to the money hospitals will receive under federal coronavirus relief packages. By federal statute, those cuts may not be administered until after the COVID-19 crisis is declared over.

In addition, the Consumer Directed Personal Assistance Program (CDPAP) allows Medicaid recipients to hire family members, friends or other familiar parties as caregivers with their salaries paid by the program. The Personal Care Services Program allows recipients to receive personal care services via homecare agencies who contract with the local department of social service.

To be eligible for care, recipients must now meet three or more daily living skills. And treatment will need to be prescribed by a qualified independent physician approved by the Department of Health and not the Medicaid recipient’s treating physician.

Finally, anyone who plans to apply for Medicaid-funded home care in New York State would be wise to do so before Oct. 1. Currently, there is no look back period regarding transfer of assets to qualify, while there is a 60-month look back period when applying for Medicaid nursing home care. That is about to change.

Cuomo’s budget for the next fiscal year has rewritten the requirements. Now, Medicaid officials will look at any non-exempt transfer of assets made 30 months prior to application for home care as of Oct. 1. Non-exempt transfers are those made without receiving any fair trade in return.

“What this means is that many people will get no help at all and likely die or spend money they really don’t have,” said Assemblymember Richard Gottfried (D-Dist. 75). He chairs the Assembly Committee on Health. This new provision in the state budget can place undue hardship on families.

“Often a family member, usually a female, will give up a career and a large part of her life to take care of their elderly or disabled family member,” Gottfried said.

And the level of disability required to receive that care has increased as well. “People will find it much harder to get home care,” said Susan Dooha, executive director of the Center for Independence of the Disabled, New York (CIDNY).

“People who have home-care now could no longer qualify because they have to be significantly more disabled now” because of the restriction for eligibility requiring three or more of daily living skills. For those with dementia, it includes only one additional skill.

“This is based on a cruel notion that people are getting

Continued on page 15

Rights and Education Groups Demand Equality

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, along with 51 civil rights and education organizations, have called on Congress to take immediate and comprehensive action to protect equal educational opportunity during the COVID-19 public health crisis.

In a letter sent to Speaker Pelosi, Majority Leader McConnell, Minority Leader McCarthy, and Minority Leader Schumer, the groups asked that in order to minimize harm to marginalized students during this national crisis, Congress must immediately:

• Ensure federal funds are not used to discriminate
• Preserve civil rights protections and halt unrelated rulemaking
• Ensure funds are targeted to marginalized students
• Ensure oversight of federal funding
• Ensure marginalized students have access to distance learning
• Ensure equal educational opportunity for students with disabilities, English learners, students experiencing homelessness, and migrant youth
• Ensure students have access to nutritional supports
• Ensure educators and other school staff are safe and protected
• Ensure parents’ and guardians’ civil rights are protected and they have the information they need
• Protect the health, well-being, and education of children in secure and congregate settings
• Cancel student loan debt
• Maintain access to supports for college students

“Without a doubt, COVID-19 will have lasting effects for many decades to come. There is an opportunity and a responsibility to minimize harm to the next generation,” the groups’ letter stated.

Long term closures of early childhood settings, K-12 schools, and college campuses, which are necessary to protect the safety and health of communities, have significantly exacerbated longstanding inequalities in our educational system. Leadership and action from Congress can, and must, minimize the harm to marginalized students as long as COVID-19 continues to threaten the public health.

The participating organizations

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Through An Artful Lens

Many people have missed visiting the Rubin Museum this spring. Since temporarily closing its doors, the curator has found new ways to bring art and ideas from the Himalayas, which offer timeless perspectives on facing moments of transition and uncertainty, to art lovers.

Many artworks in current exhibitions are on display, including “Measure Your Existence” and “Shahidul Alam: Truth to Power.” To tackle themes of loss, change, and repair, a book is coming on new meaning in today’s world. Follow @RubinMuseum on Instagram to join the conversation and encounter future posts.
The National Fair Housing Alliance (NFHA) has sued eight companies that operate 16 assisted living facilities in Southwest U.S. The lawsuit alleges the companies discriminated against prospective elderly residents who have been deaf since birth and primarily communicate in American Sign Language (ASL). Primarily seniors occupy assisted living facilities. 

In a series of phone calls and on-site visits conducted over the past 18 months by fair housing testers on behalf of NFHA, staff at each assisted living facility either refused to provide a potential elderly deaf resident with qualified ASL interpreters or other aids and services to ensure they would be able to communicate effectively, or said that interpretation services would be charged to the resident or the resident’s family. NFHA alleges that these acts are a violation of the Fair Housing Act, which prohibits housing providers, including assisted living facilities, from discriminating against people with disabilities.

The U.S. Census Bureau’s 2017 American Community Survey found that 14.8 percent of people over the age of 65 have a hearing disability. Fair housing laws provide distinct protections for people who are deaf or hard of hearing. These consumers have the right to interpreters or other aids to ensure they can effectively communicate with housing providers.

"Assisted living facilities that deprive people of their rights are unnecessarily exacerbating housing challenges for those who are most at-risk in our society," said Lisa Rice, President and CEO of NFHA. "Especially at a time when elderly people are among those most vulnerable to COVID-19, it is critical that the people charged with their care do all they can to provide them with the legally required services they need to ensure their health and wellbeing.

For information visit the United Spinal New York City Chapter on Facebook.

Commissioner of the Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities Victor Calise also holds a weekly Zoom session where updates are provided by City Agencies and questions with City Community Partners are addressed.

Bill to Protect Seniors With Alzheimer’s

Approximately one in 10 seniors aged 60 and older have experienced some form of elder abuse. For people with Alzheimer’s and related dementias, the prevalence is higher, with some estimates putting it at just over 50 percent.

In an effort to protect seniors with dementia from harm and exploitation, U.S. Senators Susan Collins (R-Maine), Bob Menendez (D-N.J.), and Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) introduced the Promoting Alzheimer’s Awareness to Prevent Elder Abuse Act. Companion legislation is being introduced in the House by Representatives Ted Deutch (D-Fla.) and Guy Reschenthaler (R-Pa.). Sen. Collins is a founder and co-chair of the Congressional Task Force on Alzheimer’s Disease.

This bipartisan legislation would ensure that the Department of Justice’s (DOJ) elder abuse training materials take into account individuals with Alzheimer’s disease and related dementias.

“As chairman of the Senate Aging Committee, one of my top priorities is protecting our seniors against abuse,” said Sen. Collins. “During the COVID-19 pandemic, there may be increased risk for elder abuse, including elder financial exploitation. Our bipartisan bill would help to ensure that the frontline professionals who are leading the charge against elder abuse have the training needed to respond to cases where the victim or a witness has Alzheimer’s.”
ADAPT Voter Working Group Meets

L I ADAPT is collaborating with members from many organizations to help address the voter accessibility problems that are threatening the civil rights of private, independent voting for disabled New Yorkers.

Groups represented are Brooklyn Center for Independence of the Disabled (BCID), Bronx Independent Living Services (BILS), Center for the Independence of the Disabled NY (CIDNY), Self-Advocacy Association of New York State (SA-NYS), Disability Rights New York (DRNY), National Federation of the Blind (NFB), American Council for the Blind (ACB), United Spinal Assoc., United Cerebral Palsy (UCP), New York Association of Independent Living (NYAIL) and the New York Independent Living Council (NYSILC).

After researching how the Boards of Elections (BOEs) of each locality are planning to carry out the executive orders to disseminate absentee ballots, LI ADAPT is advocating that New York state develop an accessible (fillable, HTML) online absentee ballot format that the various local BOEs can individualize for their districts, similar to what Maryland has instituted. This would address the accessibility issues of using a paper ballot for those with visual or physical impairments.

Another area in which LI ADAPT is collaborating is voter education, helping to develop and advertise voter education events online sponsored by BCID and United Spinal, on the topics of how to fill out the absentee ballot; voting and civic engagement during COVID-19 (voter rights and changes this year); voter engagement for people with disabilities (basic voting process including how to use a Ballot Marking Device (BMD)); what’s going to be on the ballot in different voting district; HAVA (Help America Vote Act)/PAVA (Protection and Advocacy for Voter Access); and ADA compliance and the complaint process with DRNY.

Members have drawn up a list of questions for our local BOEs on what they are planning for the June elections, especially regarding accessibility, particularly on which polling places will be open for early voting and the June 23 Primary day. Other questions include what the sterilization protocols will be for the BMDs and how to arrange free transportation to the polling sites for those who have to use the BMDs in order to vote privately and independently. ADAPT has invited the commissioners from each of the counties in our Downstate N.Y. region to answer these questions in person at our next virtual meeting so we can pass on this information to our members and the public.

We are working with voter engagement staff from the Centers for Independent Living to reach out to encourage more people with disabilities to register to vote and are developing a legislative report card on disability issues to educate us all about the candidates and the issues.

“Advocating for more disability voter engagement is essential to increase our voice on all of the ADA violations the governor’s budget will be causing in NYS,” said ADAPT Co-coordinator Marie Hickey. “Other areas of advocacy we are planning for LI ADAPT volunteers to participate in are insisting on poll worker training and surveying the polling sites for ADA violations during early voting and on Primary day.

AAPD Plans Summit to ‘Power The Disability Vote’

Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, the disability community is mobilizing. The American Association of People with Disabilities (AAPD) recently announced “POWER the Disability Vote, a national, non-partisan Disability & Election Virtual Summit.”

This event will happen on Monday and Tuesday, June 22 and 23 from noon to 3:45 p.m. ET on both days and will include panels, presentations and a national call-to-action to mobilize disability voters and allies. Disability groups across America are staring down the pandemic with a big question – given COVID-19’s impact on Americans with disabilities and growing numbers of voters who will acquire disabilities, will the Disability Vote be among the deciding factors in the 2020 Election?

According to a 2018 Rutgers University study, (https://smlr.rutgers.edu/news/voter-turnout-surge-among-peo-ple-disabilities) 14.3 million people with disabilities voted in 2018 - 49.3 percent of eligible voters with disabilities, compared with 40.8 percent in 2014. In 2020, more than 35 million eligible voters will be people with disabilities, not counting those that may acquire a disability as a result of COVID-19. That number increases to at least 62.7 million when adding voters who have a household member with a disability.

NY Connects can help people with disabilities...

• Remain independent
• Understand care options—
• Understand paths to care
• Find transportation—
• Discover transportation options
• Learn about supports in caregiving
• Learn about caregiver supports
• Get answers about Medicaid, Medicare, and health insurance
• Apply for benefits
• Find housing—
• Learn housing options

NY Connects can help!
Call 1-844-862-7930

NY Connects can help people with disabilities...
COVID-19: Lighthouse Guild Programs and Services Updates

We are modifying all of our programs so that we can continue to provide services during this COVID-19 pandemic.

If you receive services in our Health Center and need assistance, please call 212-769-6313

If you receive services in our Behavioral Health services and need assistance, please call 212-769-7800

If you or someone you know is blind or visually impaired and needs assistance, please call 800-284-4422

Visit our web page for the latest information: lighthouseguild.org/covid

We are a Medicare and Medicaid provider and accept many insurance plans.
We are licensed by the NYS Office of Mental Health (OMH).

UNITED SPINAL NOW

The Return

BY JAMES WEISMAN
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

The return to normal seems a long way away in the New York area, but America is reopening, despite climbing COVID-19 numbers. The reopening of businesses and places of public accommodation is dangerous if done too early and may remain dangerous to some far longer than to others.

The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and New York’s non-discrimination laws apply to people who need accommodation because of their disabilities as America opens its doors. Say, for example, you have a disability that makes you more vulnerable than people without that disability to the COVID-19 virus.

You are employed in a customer contact position and have been called back to work by your employer. You are understandably nervous, as this could be a life-threatening situation. You tell your employer you can’t return yet, because you need to know the virus is gone or until you’ve had a vaccine.

Does your employer have to let you stay home? Can you keep collecting unemployment, despite the fact that your employer has invited you back to work? Does your employer’s sick leave policy, which you have exhausted, have to change to accommodate you?

COVID-19 will challenge people with disabilities and employers, as people return to work. A primary ADA employer responsibility is to behave reasonably in response to request for reasonable accommodation. Therefore, employers must be flexible about return-to-work policies, as they relate to people with disabilities. Policies which seem ironclad may have to be modified to reasonably accommodate workers needing more leave time.

Some employers may not be able to accommodate indefinite leave requests. The friction, when considering disability discrimination accommodation, is always the point where reasonable becomes unreasonable and the needs of employees and employers differ from employee-to-employee and employer-to-employer. Disability advocates, however, can always argue that the law requires reasonable accommodation. It is their right.

One thing the COVID-19 crisis has done for people with disabilities is demonstrate to employers that employees can be productive from remote locations and may not have to be in the office every day, or at all. The receptivity to work-from-home bodes well for people with disabilities and aging baby boomers wishing to remain in the labor force. If large numbers of employers abandon central offices because COVID-19 has convinced them of the possibility of productive work-from-home employees, there will be an abundance of office space available.

More space available is necessary in the short run, too, because as we return to the workplace, stores, restaurants, and dare I say, stadiums, arenas and theaters, we will have to be socially distant from each other. Employers and proprietors of places of public accommodation will have to rethink how we shop, work, and interact.

While I have been sheltering-in-place and have been to few stores, those I have gone to have put up some temporary and some permanent barriers between cashiers and customers.

Continued on page 15
By Karin Falcone Krieger

COVID-19 Parallels Polio Virus Epidemic

National, state and local media outlets across the country have drawn historical parallels between the polio virus epidemic during the first half of the 20th Century and the current virus epidemic, COVID-19.

Fear, quarantine and strange theories and cures are abundant in both eras. Nadina LaSpina contracted polio at 16 months old in her native Sicily in the early 1950's. Her recent memoir recounts the days of her recovery and her parents move to the U.S. for better treatment options, inspired by Pres. Franklin Delano Roosevelt's miraculous "cure" during the polio hospital

Susan Gordon, right, at St. Charles Polio Hospital.

"People have forgotten just how big of a deal this was," said Ryan's mother, Adele Gordon. Born in 1919, Adele had no idea how it was transmitted. How it was effecting children and led to paralysis. How it was originally treated. Did they use electric shocks and other tortures, because they didn't know what to do? "It was fear and people didn't want to be in contact," said Ryan. "It was fear and people didn't know how it was contracted. One of the theories was that you contracted it from public swimming pools, which didn't turn out to be true. It was the whole fear of other people that caused my parents to be alone going through this."

By the time Ryan returned from St. Charles using braces and crutches, the vaccine was widely available and things had gone back normal in her neighborhood, where she played in the streets with her friends. "I think in those days people were very respectful and understood we need to be careful. The difference today is that there is an attitude of, 'I am going to do what I want to do.'"

Continued on page 16
Im a New Yorker with multiple disabilities and chronic medical conditions. I've had chronic respiratory infection since I was a child. As I aged, I developed asthma.

In the 1950s and 1960s the standard asthmatic treatment was antibiotics and steroids. Each course of steroids would be followed by a short course of hyperglycemia which would resolve as the steroids were tapered. In my late twenties I began injecting insulin. Thirty plus years of steroids and insulin lead to kidney failure.

From the frequent steroids, I developed a number of side effects ranging from osteoporosis to cataracts. In spite of these, I remained physically active as I became frailer. In 1992 I was discharged using a manual wheelchair. A few years later, I became the director of operation for a community based rehabilitation practice responsible for an early intervention preschool program.

In November, I was admitted to the hospital with CoV-HKU1 and I was diagnosed with Stage IV (severe) kidney failure.

Hearing had more than 25 surgeries (mostly orthopedic), I told my nephrologist that I was not interested in a transplant but was opting for peritoneal dialysis at home. My primary care physician seemed taken back by my decision. My nephrologist was concerned if I would be approved for a transplant.

There are still some issues to be resolved, a major issue being the number of COVID-19 patients needing dialysis. I’ve heard of patients who have been on daily hemodialysis for years whose facility based hemodialysis sessions have been reduced to once or twice a week.

Part of my kidney failure treatment has included infusions and injections administered at the hospital’s transplant center once or twice a month. Once or twice a month, I have blood drawn to titrate a medication.

I try my best to combine these two trips on one day. It is ironic that I schlep to the hospital for tests and treatments but am “seeing” my health care provider once or twice a month. I try to combine these two trips on one day. It is ironic that I schlep to the hospital for tests and treatments but am “seeing” my health care provider once or twice a month. It’s National Tourette Awareness Month

The Tourette Association of America (TAA), the premier national nonprofit organization serving the Tourette Syndrome (TS) and Tic Disorder community, will host a series of virtual events and activities in honor of Tourette Awareness Month, through June 15. Tourette Syndrome is a neurodevelopmental disorder, impacting an estimated 1 million Americans, characterized by sudden, involuntary movements and/or sounds called tics. Fifty percent of individuals impacted are undiagnosed due to the lack of awareness, lack of general understanding about the condition and stigma. The TAA has launched feel-good initiatives and comprehensive virtual events to keep the community engaged. Those impacted by the condition have been experiencing heightened symptoms like coughing, sniffing, and throat clearing tics, as well as extreme anxiety, OCD, depression and other co-occurring conditions. Social distancing has heightened mental illness, tics, and co-occurring conditions for the community. These virtual events bring the disorder to the forefront during the COVID-19 era, helping to create a more universal understanding of the challenges faced each day, as well as to share successes.

• Virtual Quilt – The TAA has designed a virtual quilt entwined with stories of inspiration, hope and community. This virtual quilt is a narrative of the unique experiences and stories to embrace and comfort one another.
• Tourette Pledge – TAA is asking people to take a pledge to not use Tourette Syndrome as a punchline, descriptor or slur. This effort serves to raise understanding and acceptance for TS and Tic Disorders.
• Miles for Tourette – Participants can virtually walk, run and cycle through June 15 to raise funds and awareness for TS. Funds raised will benefit research, support necessary programs, and foster social acceptance of Tourette.
• Teal Tuesdays: June 2 and June 9 – Wear teal on Tuesdays to support Tourette.

People are committed to raising awareness and fostering social acceptance of Tourette, which affects 1 in every 100 school-aged children,” said Amanda Talty, president and CEO of the Tourette Association. “We want people to see the Tourette community beyond their tics. They are diverse and talented and bring incredible gifts as students, leaders, parents, teachers, actors, musicians, athletes and so much more.”

Continued on page 16
**Hip Hoppers Help Healing with ‘Quarantine Music’**

Bronx-based inspiration-al hop-hop duo and dis-a-ability activists 4 Wheel City is encouraging fans to keep their chins up and make it through the COVID-19 crisis. 4 Wheel City will be dropping its latest project “Quarantine Music Raw & Uncut,” with 19 songs focused on the current situation and overcoming it. All proceeds raised from the proj-ect will go to people with dis-a-abilities who have been affect-ed by the virus. Popular Bronx rap star, Fred the Godson, who died from coronavirus is fea-tured on one of the songs.

“Quarantine Music’ reflects everything that’s been happen-ing since the economic shut-down and quarantine started,” said Namel “Tapwaterz” Nor-ris, one half of 4 Wheel City along with Ricardo “Rickfire” Velasquez. “It’s inspired by the effects coronavirus has had on the world. Music has the power to change the world. We hope the music helps people deal and heal in these uncertain times.” Norris and Velasquez both use wheelchairs after sustain-ing gunshot wounds. They use their skill as musicians, cha-risma and life-experiences to educate about disabilities and other important social issues. In the process 4 Wheel City has won praise far and wide.

To learn more, and for news about “Quarantine Music Raw & Uncut” visit their web-site, [https://distrokid.com/hyperfollow/4wheelcity/quarantine-music-vol-1](https://distrokid.com/hyperfollow/4wheelcity/quarantine-music-vol-1).

**School Provides Virtual Workshops for Autistic Youth**

This summer can still be about new adventures and making new friends for youth with autism.

Exceptional Minds is of-fering remote summer work-shops ranging in subject from character animation and ani-mated shorts to 3D modeling and game creation. The work-shops start in June and are open to pre-teens and teens on the spectrum who are inter-ested in exploring the digi-tal arts for fun or as a possible career path.

Workshops are conducted over Zoom and taught by pro-fessional instructors at the nonprofit vocational school and working studio. Excep-tional Minds graduates have gone on to work for studios such as Cartoon Network and Marvel Studios and on Oscar nominated films such as “Star Wars: The Rise of Skywalk-er” and “Avengers: Endgame.”

Every year the school opens its doors during the summer break to offer introductory classes for youth with au-tism; this year marks its first remote summer workshops modeled after its successful virtual tutoring and continu-ing online core program in compliance with physical dis-tancing policies.

In addition to two-week summer workshops, Excep-tional Minds is offering social engagement electives ranging from improv and drawing to Dungeons & Dragons game activities.

The workshops are avail-able in four summer sessions between June 15 and Aug. 14. Sign up at [www.exceptional-minds.org/summerworkshops.html](http://www.exceptional-minds.org/summerworkshops.html).

**4 Wheel City Organizes Relief Effort**

4 Wheel City has teamed up with the Limitless Free and United organization to raise funds for PPE supplies for the disabled community in New York City. Donations of $25 or more will receive a free early download/stream of the duo’s upcoming album “Quarantine Music.”


Due to the COVID-19 out-break the organization has had to alter how it serves the com-munity and its needs. Those alterations birthed the Mine and Yours Facebook group (M.A.Y.) where members are able to interact with each oth-er, ask for what they need, and learn some new things.

Administrators of the M.A.Y. have also created a phone list to reach out to members about their needs and have conver-sations. One of the topics that comes up often in conversation is the need for supplies like disposable underpads, wipes, and catheters.
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USEFUL CONTACTS

NYC information in 12 languages – www1.nyc.gov/site/doh/health/health-topics/coronavirus.page

Food – nyc.gov/getfood

NY Connects program – 844 862-7930

CIDNY office, Manhattan – 212 674-2300

CIDNY Queens – 646 442-1520


NYC Human Rights – 311 or 718 722-3131 Text: 311-692

File a complaint – nyc.gov/HumanRights

Tutoring – stem@cnyc.edu

Special Education – Advocates for Children – 866 427-6033

Help for Parents – 311

Appointments for Antibodies Testing – https://nychealthandhospitals.org

City Hiring Contact Tracers – http://nyc.gov/traceteam

For Support, 9 a.m. - 9 p.m. – 844 NYC-4NYC

For Food Assistance – http://nyc.gogetfood or call 311


Free, 24/7 Confidential Mental Health Support – 888 NYC-Well

To report Covid-19 price gouging overcharge or call 311 and say “Overcharge” – http://oa.nyc.gov


Office for People with Developmental Disabilities – https://on.nys.gov/2vxvMrE

NYS Long Term Care Ombudsman Program – 212 812-2901

NYS Mental Health Hotline – 844 863-9014


New York State Division of Human Rights – 888 392 - 3644

File a complaint – dhr.ny.gov


Social Security and Coronavirus – www.ssa.gov/coronavirus/


American Foundation for the Blind – www.afb.org


Food for service animals – 929 221-6992
The Department of Consumer and Worker Protection (DCWP) is now offering remote free tax prep services with NYC Free Tax Prep, according to Lorelei Salas, the agency’s commissioner.

New Yorkers who earned $64,000 or less in 2019 are eligible for the virtual free tax preparation with Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (VITA)/Tax Counseling for the Elderly (TCE) certified preparer. New Yorkers who earned $69,000 or less in 2019 are eligible for free remote assistance. This year, the tax deadline has been moved from April 15 to July 15.

As we are currently faced with a public health crisis, we strive to continue making our services accessible to New Yorkers,” said Salas. “With many New Yorkers experiencing significant financial hardship due to COVID-19, we want to help ease that stress and frustration by offering our trusted and professional tax prep services virtually so that all eligible New Yorkers can continue to file safely and for free – and to claim their vital stimulus payments.”

The free remote service includes:
- **Virtual Free Tax Preparation**
  - New Yorkers with an annual income of $64,000 or less with children, or $45,000 or less without children, are eligible. Those who need assistance filing their Economic Impact Payment also qualify for this service. Filers can submit photos or scans of tax documents to the preparer via a secure platform, confirm their identity using secure video conference, and complete their return by video conference or by phone with a preparer. Filers will need access to the internet and a smartphone, tablet or computer to use this service.

**Assisted Self-Preparation**
- New Yorkers with an annual income of $69,000 or less can complete their own 2019 tax returns using eligible free tax filing platforms and receive assistance from an IRS certified VITA/TCE volunteer preparer over the phone or by email. Filers will need access to a computer, tablet, or smartphone; a stable internet connection; an email address and their 2018 adjusted gross income (AGI) or self-select PIN.

Several of DCWP’s NYC Free Tax Prep providers are now providing remote services, with more providers beginning in the coming weeks. Services are available in English, Spanish, French, Haitian-Creole, Russian, and Arabic, with others coming soon. Services are available Monday through Friday from 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. and on Saturday from 9:00 a.m. to 2:00 p.m. (hours subject to change).

**Economic Impact Payments**
- Under the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, eligible individuals and families will receive by direct deposit or mail Economic Impact Payment (stimulus payment) of up to $1,200 (for single filers) and $2,400 (for married couples filing jointly) plus an additional $500 for each dependent child under age 17.

**NYC Free Tax Prep** can provide guidance on how to use IRS tools to check the status of a stimulus payment; get full payment if you have dependent children under age 17; and get the payment by direct deposit. A bank account should be set up in order to receive payment safely and quickly.

**Support Groups Provide Help For Everyone**

By Linda Gerra

A support group is a group of people who meet regularly, by traditional face-to-face meetings, telephone conferences, or various online platforms, to support one another through a difficult time or issue. They provide opportunities for like-minded people to share their personal feelings and thoughts on their experiences and circumstances. Participants gain insight from hearing the challenges, successes and coping strategies of others and a minimum commitment to the group is usually required. Groups are guided by leaders trained to run a group and the subject/issues the group is focusing on.

The Covid-19 Pandemic has forced many to live and work from home. Instead of the traditional face-to-face meeting formats, support groups can now easily meet via telephone conferences or various online platforms.

Support groups are not the same as therapy sessions, and it’s important to understand the difference. A therapy group is led by licensed professionals, usually psychiatrists, psychologists or social workers. They follow structured approaches to promoting change in their members. They focus on the individual growth of each member and help them work towards identified goals. Attendance is usually mandatory and there is often a fixed number of meetings.

Support groups provide the participants with various types of help for coping with things such as mental health, vision loss, bereavement, trauma, stroke, etc. Participants can be of all ages and backgrounds, but they join a group to share and support each other around the same issue.

People with disabilities benefit from support groups to help them live active, healthy and fulfilling lives. Topics for these groups may focus on socialization, decision-making, education, planning and services.

People with disabilities including those with vision loss face unique challenges in managing their lives. Participants share resources, advice and hope on living and coping. Group members help each other identify solutions that will maximize their living situations.

Parents are often overwhelmed with the complexities...
The Brooklyn D.A.’s Office reports that COVID-19 has brought out its share of scammers. Anyone who has been targeted or is the victim of a crime, should call the D.A.’s Action Center Hotline at 718 250-2540. Common coronavirus scams to be aware of are:

- The IRS has issued an advisory for taxpayers to be on the lookout for a surge of calls and email phishing, including scams related to the distribution of government issued economic impact payments.
- The NYPD Crime Prevention Division said people have been scammed attempting to get refunds for flights cancelled due to coronavirus. Consumers should make sure they are on the real airline website and know that they will never be asked to purchase gift cards of any kind to obtain a refund.
- Beware of the city’s website, www.NYC.gov, calling about disconnecting Con Edison service. Con Edison will not turn off service during this health emergency.
- The Social Security Administration (SSA) warned the public about fraudulent letters threatening suspension of Social Security benefits due to coronavirus-related office closures.

PAUSE ENFORCEMENT

The governor has established the New York State PAUSE Enforcement Assistance Task Force where individuals can file complaints regarding the operation of non-essential businesses or gatherings 24-hours-a-day, seven-days-a-week. Use the online form at https://mylicense.custhelp.com/app/ask or call 833 789-0470 to file a complaint.

SECTION 8

Section 8 voucher recipients who have experienced a recent loss of income, can visit the NYCHA Self-Service Portal to complete an interim recertification to reflect interim rental changes. NYCHA is also halting all termination actions for Section 8 participants. Learn more at https://nychajournal.nyc.

PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS

All New York City playgrounds are closed until further notice, but open spaces within parks will remain open and subject to social distancing guidelines.

DOE FOOD PICKUP LOCATIONS

The Department of Education’s free grab-and-go meals previously reserved to children are now available to all New Yorkers. Three free meals are available in more than 400 locations across the five boroughs. Visit https://www1.nyc.gov/site/education/schoolfoodnyc/meals/default.aspx.

For the most up to date information on prevention and treatment practices of COVID-19 in multiple languages visit www. nyc.gov/Coronavirus, text “COVID” to 392-392, call 311 or text 311 at 311-692.

Anyone with specific questions or concerns should contact the Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities directly at: Voice Phone, 212 788-2830; Video Phone, 646 396-5830.

PURCHASING FOOD AND SUPPLIES

The food and delivery services available are continually being updated on the city’s website, www1.nyc.gov/Disability-Coronavirus. The site also features a feedback form.

The Mayor’s Office for People with Disabilities has been advocating for the expansion of custom hours that grocery stores have been setting aside for seniors to include people with disabilities. There is an ongoing list that is updated regularly.

DEPARTMENT OF MOTOR VEHICLES

DMV has extended the due dates for car inspections until further notice. DMV offices are closed. Online transactions, including license renewals, are still available and license/permit expirations will be extended. Go to https://dmv.ny.gov for more information.

SENIORS

Five-meal packages are delivered weekly to senior center participants’ homes. To receive these meals, seniors should contact their local senior center. They can also call 311 or DFTA’s Aging Connect at 212-AGING-NYC (212-244-6469).

Homebound older adults already receiving home-delivered meals will continue to receive them as usual. Those interested in signing up should call to see if they are eligible for home-delivered services.

MET COUNCIL

The Met Council at https://www.metcouncil.org/coronavirus is a great resource for vulnerable New Yorkers looking for assistance, including unemployment.

TAX FILING DEADLINES

The deadline for filing city, state and federal income tax returns is July 15.

REGIONAL ENRICHMENT CENTERS

Regional Enrichment Centers are open Monday through Friday, 7:30 a.m. to 6 p.m., for the children of essential workers. These centers are staffed and will provide children with three hot meals a day. For more information, go to www.schools.nyc.gov.

UNEMPLOYMENT INSURANCE

The New York State Department of Labor’s page for unemployment insurance now has information in multiple languages. Go to www.labor.ny.gov.

SNAP BENEFITS

You can apply for SNAP and Cash Assistance, and more, online at www.a069-access.nyc.gov.

FOOD AND SUPPLIES

Food and delivery services information is available at https://www1.nyc.gov. The site is continually updated and includes COVID-19 food assistance resources.

CENSUS

Filling out the census is critical to ensuring that our hospitals and public health institutions receive the necessary funding to serve our communities, especially in times of crisis. Find the online form at https://my2020census.gov.

— CHECK FOR UPDATES OF ALL INFORMATION —

Youth With Autism Feeds PWD

Autistic Young Man in Boston Collects Grocery Cards to Feed Disabled in a show of Solidarity with the most vulnerable. Esteban Barriga 23, diagnosed at age 2 with autism realized that families with physical disabilities cannot stand in long lines at food banks. He and his mom Maribel Rueda launched a supermarket card donation campaign called “AGW Food Drive” to help feed Boston’s disabled communities affected by Covid-19. Massachusetts is the third state of the country most affected with COVID-19 patients, there are as of today more than 53,000 cases diagnosed and 2730 deaths, according to Johns Hopkins University.
Twelve Honored for Improving Jobs for Youth

The U.S. Department of Labor’s Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP) has instituted funding awards under its Supplemental Security Income (SSI) Youth Solutions initiative, which aims to identify and evaluate strategies for improving employment outcomes for young adults from ages 14 to 24 who apply for or receive SSI.

ODEP solicited proposals for innovative and evidence-based actions including legislative, regulatory and policy changes that can increase labor force participation and economic success among this population. Mathematica, a policy research company based in Princeton, N.J., is administering the initiative under contract with ODEP.

ODEP selected 12 to receive stipends and technical assistance to expand their proposed ideas into detailed white papers. In turn, the agency will use these white papers to inform their work on this issue and share them with a broad audience that includes local, state and federal policymakers.

“We are excited to now be at the point when we can help expand upon initial promising ideas and develop them further to see what’s possible,” said Jennifer Sheehy, deputy assistant secretary in the Office of Disability Employment Policy. “There is a wide range of ideas to explore, and it’s our hope that, once examined closely, they’ll help the department and our federal agency partners promote policy that better supports young adults on SSI envision a life of work and self-sufficiency.”

The award recipients will draft their policy ideas this spring. They will produce final papers for ODEP and present their recommendations at a conference in Washington, D.C. in early 2021. Following the presentations, Mathematica will produce a synthesis report summarizing the job-creating options.

ODEP is the only non-regulatory federal agency that promotes policies and coordinates with employers and all levels of government to increase workplace success for people with disabilities. Its mission is to develop and influence policies and practices that increase the number and quality of employment opportunities for people with disabilities.

AAPD Internships Postponed

The American Association of People with Disabilities has postponed the 2020 AAPD Summer Internship Program to the summer of 2021. After monitoring the impact of the current pandemic and discussing the possibilities with AAPD’s board and partners, it was decided that there are too many unknowns associated with COVID-19 to safely proceed with the program in its traditional form.

AAPD’s Summer Internship Program is a career development opportunity for many students and recent graduates with disabilities. The program cultivates disability rights leaders, who are critical to AAPD’s mission and the disability rights movement as a whole. Despite this postponement, AAPD remains committed to providing young leaders with an opportunity to gain meaningful employment and leadership opportunities, including the 2020 cohort.

For the summer of 2020 AAPD will implement the following changes: offer the selected 2020 interns an opportunity to participate in the 2021 program; host an online disability advocacy curriculum during the summer of 2020. Students who elect to take the disability advocacy curriculum will receive a stipend for their participation; virtually pair 2020 students with a mentor.

The organization will welcome interns in Princeton, N.J., is administering the initiative under contract with ODEP.

“Who Said You Can’t Dance,” was recently recognized as best short inspirational documentary at the third annual American Filmmatic Arts (AFA) Awards ceremony in Brooklyn. The movie is about wheelchair users who learn to dance alongside standing partners. In part, it is meant to illustrate that people with physical disabilities can participate in and enjoy many of the same activities as those who are able-bodied.

AFA celebrates independent films. The winners are chosen by more than 20 jurors who are in the field as film critics, filmmakers, industry professionals, distributors and producers.

The film was created by producer/director David Block, who has been legally blind since birth. He has made seven documentaries, some of which have won film festival awards and been televised. He is also a freelance journalist who has had more than 1500 articles published in newspapers and magazines. Over the years, he has interviewed many high-profile athletes, celebrities, government leaders and musicians.

For information visit www.blindfilmaker.com.

BILLS TO PROTECT SENIORS

continued from page 4

The application cycle will open in early fall of 2020.

For information email AAPD Programs Manager, Christine Liao, at internships@aapd.com.

ASSISTED LIVING FACILITIES SUED

continued from page 4

For people who are deaf or hard of hearing, that includes ASL interpreters or other effective communication aids. We are filing these actions in court to hold these companies accountable.”

The lawsuits were filed against Brookdale Senior Living, Spectrum Retirement Communities, Pacifica Senior Living, LifeSpire Assisted Living, LeisureCare, and BeeHive Homes. These companies operate the 16 facilities (full list below) investigated by NFHA in New Mexico and Utah, covering more than 1,100 beds. Brookdale Senior Living is the largest assisted living provider in the country with control of over 41,485 assisted living units nationwide. BeeHive Homes operates more than 170 facilities in 20 states.

With this reach, the companies have the ability to affect hundreds of thousands of families, making it critical to hold them accountable to the requirements of the Fair Housing Act.

ASSISTED LIVING FACILITIES SUED

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TRGS PROVIDERS RELAY WAIVERS EXTENDED THROUGH JUNE 30
The FCC has released an order extending temporary waivers through June 30 for telecommunications relay services (TRS) providers to ensure relay services remain available during the COVID-19 pandemic.
These waivers allow TRS providers flexibility to deal with reduced staffing and increased call volumes, to enable more of their employees to provide services from their homes and to expand the pool of contractors qualified to provide American Sign Language interpretation services for Video Relay Service (VRS).
It also temporarily waived two additional TRS rules to enable Internet Protocol Relay Service communications assistants to provide service from home workstations and to allow registered VRS users who are abroad, and did not preregister to make calls from abroad, to make calls to the U.S. during the national emergency.
General information on TRS is available at https://www.fcc.gov/general/telecommunications-relay-services-trs. For more information, contact Bill Wallace at 202-418-2716 or email William.Wallace@fcc.gov. Those who use videophones and are fluent in American Sign Language (ASL) may call the FCC’s ASL Consumer Support Line at 844 432-2275 (videophone).

DISASTER HOTLINE FOR COVID-19 HELP
In light of limitations of response capabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Partnership for Inclusive Disaster Strategies has established a hotline that provides information, referrals, guidance, technical assistance and resources to people with disabilities, their families, allies, organizations assisting disaster impacted individuals with disabilities and others seeking assistance.
The disaster hotline is always available for intake calls, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year at 800 626-4959 and info@disasterstrategies.org.

IN-PERSON VOTING MUST BE HELD AS WELL AS VOTING BY MAIL
It is hoped that making it easier for people to cast ballots from their homes will stem COVID-19 outbreaks and ensure that people who are quarantined or acting as caregivers during these difficult times can participate in the democratic process. In expanding vote by mail, officials must maintain in-person voting options as well. Eliminating or reducing in-person options would inadvertently disenfranchise many African American voters, voters with disabilities, American Indian and Alaska Native voters and those who rely on same-day voter registration, according to the Center for American Progress.

ABLE ACCEPTS EVENT AND PROGRAM INFORMATION
Able Newspaper will print event and program information from agencies when space permits. Send items to ablenews@aol.com.
MEET A COMPANION, PHONE FRIEND, PEN PAL, OR EVEN A SPOUSE

I am a pretty Asian American lady in her 50’s. I look Latin. 5ft 5 inches tall, looking for a pen pal or companionship with a man age 47 to 62 yrs., who likes museums, comedy clubs, board games, nature, art, music, talking and golf. I am college educated. Please provide phone number and photo.

SWM, 56, wheelchair user, seeks single female 40-55 for friendship and more. Into baseball, fishing, comedy clubs. I live in Sayville, NY. I do not drive. Send photo and phone number.

Senior Female, Nassau, looking for senior male to enjoy simple things in life, family, hugs, walking WHLL, Platters.

A God-fearing SBM, 41 seeking a God-fearing woman for long term relationship, and to spend the rest of my life with. I love going out to the movies and listening to music. I do not drive.

SWP, Nassau County, widow wishes to meet senior male retiree, 74 plus for companionship.

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MEDICAID CUTS

Continued from page 3

home care when they don’t really need it,” Gottfried said. If they cannot receive home care, they certainly cannot be admitted to a nursing home. “This leaves many people without publicly funded home care.” According to Gottfried, there is plenty of support in the legislature to relax this new restriction. However, that is not a possibility without Cuomo’s say so. “They would be vetoed by the governor,” he said. “The governor has enormously more power in budget negotiations than the legislature. The notion of checks and balances is missing when it comes to New York budget system under our constitution.”

Gottfried does have support in the legislature to push back on some of those changes. “We are already drafting legislation to roll back or diminish the effect of some of what we did [when we passed the budget].”

But getting any change enacted would depend on convincing the governor to accept it. “We need a large and loud group of people demanding that New York state make big wealth pay a much larger share,” Gottfried said. “[Big wealth] has benefited from extraordinary economic benefits with profits ending up in fewer hands [in addition to] extraordinary tax benefits.” The rest of the population is paying higher taxes and not getting the services, especially health care, he added.

Dooha stressed that people need to speak up. “We must be ready to get our stories out about how people are harmed,” she said.

“During the previous fights, people may have hung back, not wanting their personal story in print. The fight isn’t over. [But] if we can’t get those stories out, then people will suffer these losses alone.”

UNITED SPINAL NOW

Continued from page 6

These barriers – sometimes a table or a plexiglass shield – are placed with little regard for people with physical disabilities and less regard for laws requiring accessible design and facilities.

This, I hope, is a temporary problem caused by this emergency, but as this emergency drags on and becomes a way of life, we must reeducate businesses open to the public about the rights of people with disabilities to independent access and reasonable accommodation.

The 30th anniversary of the ADA is July 26. I hope by then we can all celebrate together, if not shoulder-to-shoulder, then virtually. When we are back to normal – maybe the 31st, 32nd ADA anniversary – let’s have a real blow-out. Stay safe.

SUPPORT GROUPS

Continued from page 11


Dr. Linda Gerra is the director of Family Support Network for Lighthouse Guild.

TO PLACE AN AD

Just write your ad and mail it with payment and coupon below to Able Personals, P.O. Box 395, Old Bethpage, N.Y. 11804 or email to ableangela@aol.com. We will assign an Able personal number and forward all responses to you. Be sure to include your name and address. Just $12 for 15 words plus $1 for each additional word to appear one month.

TO ANSWER AN AD

Put your response letter in an envelope with the # of the person you are writing on the front. Put this envelope in another envelope addressed to Able personals, P.O. Box 395, Old Bethpage, N.Y. 11804. Enclose $2 per response to cover the cost of handling and mailing fees. Do not send cash. Checks or money orders only. Be sure to include your address or phone number. For faster response place a postage stamp on envelope.

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POLIO PARALLELS
Continued from page 7

want,” which is different.”

La Spina explained, “One worry now is being high risk for contracting COVID-19. Anesthesia and intubation are risky for people with post-polio syndrome, because of already compromised lungs. Since this is respiratory, it’s particularly risky for us and in addition we are older.

ONE WOMAN’S EXPERIENCE
Continued from page 8

providers on my smart phone. Hopefully, my upcoming nephrology visit will resolve the dialysis issue.

Given the frequency of my respiratory infections, in the past year, I’ve been spending more and more time at home. I have given up a number of advocacy affiliations and participating in meetings and so forth by phone or online. Social distancing seems a normal progression. I have been living mostly on soups that are frozen and zapped.

One of the most annoying aspects of social distancing is people out and about, but who questions why we are not staying at home. I try to combine multiple errands in one trip. The other day, I received a box of produce and promptly made soup.

The book tour virtually.

Ironically, a version of the polio vaccine is being touted as a possible cure for COVID-19.

Nadina LaSpina’s memoir, “Such a Pretty Girl” was published in 2019. She is a prominent activist in the disability rights movement. LaSpina created and taught courses in ASL in New York City.

Susan Gordon Ryan was a special education teacher, worked for the New York State Office of Parks, Recreation & Historic Preservation, founded the “Empire State Games for the Physically Challenged” and was the first woman to serve as the regional director for the Long Island State Parks System.

As teenagers LaSpina and Ryan met when they were hospitalized at the Hospital for Special Surgery in Manhattan.
Ricochet, a therapy dog, is providing comfort and healing virtually during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to social distancing and quarantine, traditional animal-assisted therapy programs have been suspended.

“At a time when dogs could be truly valuable resources, we’re thinking outside the box in an effort to offer some form of canine therapy to the millions of people around the world who need it,” said Ricochet’s guardian Judy Fridono.

The virtual canine therapy program is multi-faceted. First, there is a web page that has close-up photos of the dog’s eyes coupled with calming music. Hundreds of individuals who have visited the page have reported they felt a calm, connected state of being. Eye contact is one of the anxiety-reducing techniques that Ricochet uses in her face-to-face therapy dog sessions with service members and veterans with PTSD. Gazing into a dog’s eyes stimulates the release of oxytocin — a hormone associated with positive, happy feelings.

The program also features video conferencing, using apps such as Zoom, FaceTime and Skype. These sessions are offered to families who lost a loved one to COVID-19, doctors, nurses, frontline workers and anyone else suffering a loss or feeling stressed and anxious. Ricochet provides a calm demeanor of comfort and support where a participants’ emotions can be safely released as they are spun into a cocoon of positive energy, healing and recovery.

Most recently, Paws on Power Dogs. Although movie theaters are closed due to the pandemic, kids can still interact with Ricochet from the safety of their own home. They can watch the movie trailer, download the activities booklet and view a behind-the-scenes video.

The COVID-19 pandemic is a source of great physical, psychological and emotional distress for front line workers as well as individuals and communities around the world. There will likely be doctors, nurses and others who will need treatment for anxiety, stress, depression, PTSD and more resulting from this crisis. Then there is the rest of the world that is feeling the panic of losing jobs, being ordered to stay home and having an uncertain future.

Ricochet has more than eight years of experience providing human-animal intervention for active duty service members recovering from combat PTSD, moral injury, anxiety and other mental health challenges.

Ricochet is helping to prevent suicide among health care professionals, reduce anxiety of essential workers, comfort families who lost a loved one, cheer up seniors in nursing homes and offer learning to school children.

Learn more about Ricochet at surfdogricochet.com and follow her on social media at @SurfDogRicochet. To schedule a session, email Fridono at pawinspired@aol.com or visit www.surfdogricochet.com.

**Virtual Race for Autism Shatters Guinness World Record**

Recently, KultureCity broke the Guinness World Record® title for “most people running/jogging online simultaneously,” which was achieved during the organization’s Stay At Home Race for Autism during National Autism Awareness Month.

The race, which was hosted via Zoom, mobilized race-goers around the world, including noteworthy KultureCity supporters like former presidential candidate Andrew Yang and his wife and KultureCity board member Evelyn Yang, NBA All-Star Dominique Wilkins, Atlanta Hawks head coach Lloyd Pierce, MLB pitcher Glendon Rusch, Ken Jeong of “The Hangover,” Noah Syndergaard of the New York Mets and countless others. Race participants hailed from the United States, Canada, France and Germany.

In addition, amid the coronavirus pandemic the organization raised nearly $14,000 to support children with autism and their families. According to the most recent CDC statistics, 1 in 54 children in the United States has autism. Many of these children have challenges related to communication, an insistence on sameness and routine, and sensory sensitivities, which are heightened during the current COVID-19 pandemic. “Even in times of deep uncertainty, we can still find ways to come together to advocate for acceptance and inclusion,” said KultureCity co-founder Michele Kong. “This unpredictable time is especially difficult for children with autism, and it was remarkable to see individuals across the world gather virtually to break a Guinness World Record title in support of these children and their families.”

KultureCity is the nation’s leading nonprofit on sensory accessibility and acceptance for those with invisible disabilities. Since 2014, KultureCity has partnered with the NFL, NHL, MLB, NBA, libraries, museums and other organizations and companies to make more than 600 public spaces Sensory Inclusive™ certified. To learn more, visit www.kulturecity.org.

**Education Equality**

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include: The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights; American Association of University Women (AAUW); Bazelon Center for Mental Health Law; Center for Law and Social Policy (CLASP); Children’s Defense Fund; Disability Rights Education & Defense Fund (DREDF); Hispanic Federation; Human Rights Campaign; Justice for Migrant Women; Multicultural Efforts to end Sexual Assault (MESA); Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC); NAACP; National Association of Councils on Developmental Disabilities; and the National Center for Learning Disabilities.